



breadfortheworld
HAVE FAITH. END HUNGER.

Twenty-Second Sunday in Ordinary Time: August 28, 2011
Karen Fitzpatrick

RCL: Exodus 3:1-15; Psalm 105:1-6, 23-26, 45c; Romans 12:9-21; Matthew 16:21-28
LM: Jeremiah 20:7-9; Psalm 63:2, 3-4, 5-6, 8-9; Romans 12:1-2; Matthew 16:21-27

“Why are we so hated?” This was the common question after September 11, 2001. Those who see themselves as enemies of the U.S. are, in many cases, hungry or live in countries where the bulk of the population lives in poverty and often faces hunger. What are the connections between hunger and hatred?

Learning about our nation’s foreign policy choices can offer clues Does our country use food as a weapon or reward, or is food aid provided generously and impartially where there is need? How much foreign assistance is for development so that a poorer nation can become self-sufficient, and how much aid is for emergency relief? O does it seem more intended to bolster U.S. economic interests? A cursory reading of the daily papers or a half-hour of headline news won’t tell us all we need to know. It takes energy and commitment to be an informed citizen. United States citizens traveling in other countries are surprised at the depth and breadth of news coverage overseas compared with the froth we often are served. Some cope by subscribing to at least one periodical from the alternative press to get beyond the “company line” of the mainstream media, and some listen to public radio and the BBC.

We know the status quo can’t continue. In today’s reading from Matthew, Jesus calls us to self-denial, changing our own status quo. We who preach and lead congregations owe the people of faith no less than this; to be well informed, so that change can happen. If we know the scores and details of the sports world but are uninformed about global issues, a great possibility for some self-denial opens before us.

The reading from Romans spells out the unlimited parameters of that global concern. Feeding the enemy when they are hungry and giving drink when they are thirsty stretches us into a wider vision of community. Since famine hot spots change from year to year, a preacher attentive to global affairs will be able to pinpoint a current focus and help define a parish’s response to hunger needs. Bread for the World’s annual Hunger Report is a useful tool, and Bread for the World’s Web site, www.bread.org, or toll-free number, 1-800-82-BREAD, offer updates on current legislation and hunger crises.



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Responses to conflict and famine might include taking part in a denominational offering or organizing advocacy opportunities in the church. Calls or letters to Congress or the Administration could help enhance support for relief efforts or increase funding for development and self-sufficiency. But be aware: drawing from our Christian faith to love even our enemies can put us at odds with those who jump on the bandwagon of rampant nationalism and find any stance for peacemaking unpatriotic.

Today's Gospel also speaks about gaining the whole world, which can lead easily into denouncing materialism and our modern obsession with possessions. A word of caution is in order. This is just too easy. We can send everyone home feeling guilty even about the roof over their heads.

Instead of dwelling in guilt, perhaps Francis of Assisi provides a model. He radically turned away from material possessions but took great delight in the material world with which God gifts us. Seeing creation as good is the first step toward responsible stewardship of this great earth. Naming objects as Brother and Sister, Francis showed his connection to the things of creation. His hymns of praise glorify God for all these material gifts. Yet Francis avoided attachment, never letting a thing achieve the importance that only another being or a relationship should have.

Both options for the first reading this week describe how God calls and sends. Jeremiah experiences God's name like a fire that he cannot hold in. We have all met people who are inflamed with passion for God and the things of God. We are in awe and wish for even a portion of the prophetic spirit.

But not too large a portion! I heard Megan McKenna speak on prophets a few years ago. For Judaism prophecy was a pillar, but in our Christian faith it is a very thin layer, McKenna said. Thus we often read the Gospels as emphasizing our individual relationship with Jesus rather than connecting us to a prophetic and covenantal tradition. McKenna said prophets care about the honor of God, the response to poor people's needs, and the coming of justice. And they are all one.

So we are called to be prophetic, not to be prophets of God's word, as was Jeremiah. We will all have our prophetic moments, but if we were to *be* a prophet, we would know it. We would have no other life.



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Children's Time

From the reading from Romans find ways that children can bring food and drink to others. Use household examples, such as making a peanut butter and jelly sandwich for a younger sibling, turning on the drinking fountain for a smaller child at school, bringing a can of food for the church food collection, and taking part in the local congregation's hunger projects.

Musical Suggestions

Yigdal Elohim Chai (The God of Abraham Praise) – NCH 24

Now Let Us from This Table Rise – UMH 634

Make Me a Channel of Your Peace – FWS 2171

The Summons – FWS 2130

God It Was – GC 701

Reflection from Hunger for the Word, Year A

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